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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. J. David Linebaugh  
Chief, Plans and Regional Affairs  
Division, IR, ACDA

SUBJECT : Sensitive New Information on Soviet  
War Planning and Warsaw Pact Force  
Strengths

1. I forward for your information a preliminary appraisal of important new intelligence bearing on MBFR which has been acquired by CIA. The information is from documents relating to Warsaw Pact exercise scenarios in assumed counteroffensives against NATO in the Central Region. Included in the information is detailed Pact and NATO deployments and comparisons of NATO/Pact force elements, similar to those used in US military analyses. There are unexplained gaps in the information, and some details are open to more than one interpretation. Nevertheless, we believe the information accurately reflects a Soviet contingency plan for war with NATO.

2. Our analysis of these documents is still going on. As additional information is developed, I will bring it to your attention.

3. The source of this information is extremely sensitive and must be protected. Unauthorized disclosure of the existence of this information could and probably would result in termination of receipt of further material of this nature. Accordingly, it is imperative that you limit the further distribution of this memorandum.

BRUCE C. CLARKE, Jr.  
Director  
Strategic Research

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E17A

8 August 1973

MEMORANDUM

A Soviet View of the Balance of  
Theater Forces in Central Europe and of  
the Ground Campaign Against the NATO Center Region

1. Highly classified documents which have come into our possession shed light on how NATO and the Warsaw Pact measured up in Soviet eyes in 1969 and how Moscow approaches such force assessments. The documents also provide considerable information on the likely missions of the Soviet and East European forces in the Pact forward area (East Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia).

2. The information contained in the documents is basically consistent with the intelligence community's view of what is considered to be the standard Warsaw Pact scenario for operations against the NATO Center Region. They also support the validity of US analysis and estimates in 1969 regarding Warsaw Pact order of battle and Pact manning and equipment levels. That much is useful and reassuring, but beyond that the documents provide some important additional details about the intended staging areas for Pact armies and divisions. They also raise questions about the soundness of conventionally held notions about the role and employment of the forces in the western USSR--the so-called second strategic echelon.

The Balance of Forces

3. Tables that appear in the documents constitute comprehensive Soviet assessment

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available to us of the balance of theater forces in the center of Europe. The tables make quantitative comparisons of NATO and Warsaw Pact ground forces' divisions, manpower, and equipment in 1969. Air force strengths are omitted. The numbers given for some categories of information are subject to interpretation because of a lack of clear definition as to what units or weapons are included. Taken as a whole the tables show that the Soviets considered the ground forces of the two alliances to be generally evenly matched, except for two major asymmetries. These appear in the clear superiority ascribed to the Pact in tanks and to NATO in nuclear weapons launchers.

4. Following is a summary comparison of estimates in the 1969 OSR intelligence report, *Warsaw Pact Ground Forces Facing NATO*, SR IR 69-17, September 1969, and data contained in the documents.

TABLES

	Maritime Front		Central Front		Southern Front		(Northern Group of Forces) <sup>2/</sup>		Totals	
	Docu- ments	OSR	Docu- ments	OSR	Docu- ments	OSR	Docu- ments	OSR	Docu- ments	OSR
<u>Number of Divisions</u>	13+2 <sup>b/</sup>	13+2	27	26	16	17	--	2	56+2 <sup>b/</sup>	58+2
<u>Personnel of Combat Large Units</u>	125,979	120,000	289,466	245,000	131,542	138,000	--	17,000	544,579	540,000
<u>Tanks</u>	2,973	2,800	6,988	6,500	3,433	3,900	--	630	13,246	13,830
<u>Launchers of Nuclear Weapons</u>	49	65	664 <sup>d/</sup>	175	80	65	--	15	613	320

- The 1969 OSR report on the Warsaw Pact listed the Northern Group of Forces (NGF) as a separate force rather than as part of a forward area front. The NGF was, however, included in our estimates of aggregate Pact forces opposite the NATO Central Region. Although not specifically identified, the NGF force elements may have been incorporated in the fronts described in the documents. Our 1969 data for the NGF are presented here for comparison and inclusion in the aggregate total.
- Airborne or assault landing (amphibious) divisions.
- The precise translated meaning of this entry is not clear. We have interpreted it to refer to only the combat units discussed in the documents--line divisions and Soud brigades. Specific comparable data are not given in the 1969 OSR report, but can be derived from TO strengths listed in the report for Soviet and East European divisions.
- This disproportionately high number appears to be the result of a transcription error. The first digit is indistinct, but could be a "1" rather than a "6".

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5. The comparisons in the preceding table indicate that 1969 US estimates of Pact force elements approximate what can be regarded as an authoritative Soviet statement of Pact size. This similarity validates the approach and methods US intelligence used and continues to use in estimating forces.

6. The difference in total divisions may be partially explained by conflicting estimates of the size of the Soviet Central Group of Forces (CGF) in Czechoslovakia. In 1969 we received evidence that this force consisted of five divisions. The documents, which relate to the period late 1968 and early 1969, describe only four divisions in CGF.

7. The two Soviet tank divisions estimated to be subordinate to the Northern Group of Forces (NGF) in Poland are not specifically identified. One of these divisions may have been allocated to the forces of the Central Front. If so, this would account for the extra division given this front. The other NGF division cannot be identified in any of the force groupings.

8. These order of battle differences account for most of the differences between manpower and tank figures in the documents and in OSR estimates. In addition, the manpower figures given for the Central Front indicate that our 1969 estimates for Soviet divisional TO's--10,000 for motorized rifle and 8,000 for tank divisions--were slightly low. We currently estimate that motorized rifle divisions have 12,000 men and tank divisions 9,500. Conversely, our 1969 report counted Czech divisions as being about the same size as the Soviets. The document tables indicate that Czech divisions in 1969 were about the same size as Polish divisions--somewhat smaller than Soviet and East German divisions.

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9. The Soviet assessment of the organization and structure of NATO forces is at variance with our view of NATO in 1969. For example, the documents refer to a West German corps not known to have existed. They also inexplicably credit the Germans with six or seven more divisions than they had in 1969. In the more meaningful category of manpower, however, the estimate of NATO strength is reasonably close to the reality of the time.

#### The Ground Campaign

10. The assumptions underlying the scenario described in the documents have NATO initiating the hostilities with a broad conventional offensive. The forces of both sides are considered to be in a high state of readiness because of their respective participation in recent large-scale exercises. NATO achieves some early successes but begins to run into trouble on the second day as the Pact counteroffensive begins to develop. On D+4 the West finds itself so hard pressed that it decides to halt the Pact advance with nuclear weapons. The Pact receives evidence of the NATO decision to escalate and decides to preempt with a nuclear strike of its own. The documents suggest that about this time Pact forces have crossed the Weser River--NATO's forward defense line. It is apparently at this point that the Soviets expect NATO to initiate nuclear warfare.

#### The Operations Plan

11. The operations plan described in the documents has Pact forces in the forward area aligned in three fronts. It identifies the armies, divisions, and missile brigades of each front and specifies the initial and final objectives of each front and army and their intended axes and rates of advance. The scenario described suggests that a Pact force of 14 armies comprising 58 divisions

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would attempt to overrun the NATO Center Region, less France, in a two-phased operation lasting 11-12 days. This is consistent with what is estimated to be the Pact's plan to conduct the European campaign as a blitzkrieg and conforms to presently held views of the alignment of Pact forces and their missions.

12. Following is a discussion of the role and composition of the respective fronts as derived from our preliminary analysis of the new information:

a. The Northern Front: This front, the northernmost in the forward area, is represented as an almost exclusively Polish force. It includes 13 ground and two special purpose Polish divisions. The objective of this front is to seize the Danish Islands and the Jutland Peninsula, and to proceed across the northern plain of West Germany into the Netherlands. In Pact exercises the task of taking these parts of NATO real estate is usually assigned to the Poles. These exercises as well as the plan described in the documents suggest that the Soviets, at least in the case of this particular ally, have no overriding reservations about the formation of a national front under non-Soviet command. There have, however, been occasions in exercises when the objectives of the Northern Front were assigned to a combination of Polish, East German, and Soviet forces. The principal consideration in determining the composition of the Northern Front in Pact exercises appears to be the amount of warning time assumed to be available for Polish forces to carry out their redeployments to northern East Germany.

b. The Central Front: This front is described as consisting of five Soviet and two East German armies advancing toward Belgium and objectives on the northeastern borders of France. Although the forces of this front are described as engaging French forces in West Germany, the documents and other available Pact classified

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[REDACTED]

information suggest that any subsequent Pact operations into France will depend on the extent to which she enters the war. The treatment in the documents of the composition and mission of the Central Front provides by far the most complete information on the operation plan of that force that has ever been received and is consistent with other fragments of information that are available.

c. The Southern Front: This front is portrayed as consisting initially of one Soviet and three Czechoslovak armies. It continues to be a predominantly Czechoslovak conglomeration until the completion of the first phase of its operation on D+5-6. Sometime thereafter two of the Czechoslovak armies disappear. Of all the Pact armies that are referred to in the documents, these are the only two which are not described as reaching a final objective.

An explanation of the apparent fate of these two armies possibly lies in the probably low estimation the Soviets (and indeed the Czechoslovaks themselves) have had of the combat durability of Czech forces. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] there has been a commonly held sentiment within the Czechoslovak military that they are Soviet cannon fodder and expect their forces to be decimated within 5-7 days of the start of any major operation against NATO.

The presence in this front of a Soviet army, which is identified in the documents as consisting of the Central Group of Forces (CGF), provides the first solid indication from a Soviet source of the first-echelon role intended for this force since its establishment in 1968. It does not appear to be, as has been speculated, an advance element of the Soviet second strategic echelon force coming out of the Carpathian Military District.

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d. The Second Strategic Echelon: The absence of a role for most of the ground forces in the USSR is the principal problem raised by the scenario. The only forces represented which are normally considered to be part of the second strategic echelon are two combined arms and one air army in the Belorussian Military District. The forces are designated "the Western Front" while still in the USSR and may be meant to represent the larger second echelon force that is generally assumed to be scheduled for operations in central Europe.

The Western Front does not make its appearance in the scenario until D+8-9 when it is established in an area where the Central and Southern Fronts adjoin. The armies of these two fronts have essentially completed their missions by then and three of them are reassigned to the new front. If the Western Front is representative of the entire second strategic echelon, its appearance in this particular scenario suggests that the Soviets consider its principal remaining task to be the conquest of France. It has been calculated from other evidence that the bulk of the forces of the first strategic echelon--those normally in the forward area--were expected to expend themselves somewhere near the Rhine. The second echelon would then come smashing through to complete the campaign against West Germany and the Benelux countries and push to the borders of France.

e. Hungary and the SGF: Nowhere in the documents is there reference to Hungary and the Soviet group of forces (SGF) stationed there, even though the scenario shows a violation by NATO of Austria's neutrality. Pact forces in Hungary are generally considered to be targeted for operations in the Balkan theater although there has been some [REDACTED] evidence of a possible role against the NATO Center Region if NATO does not respect Austria's neutrality.

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